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BJP EMERGES THE LARGEST PARTY IN MAHARASHTRA LOCAL BODY POLLS

The BJP on Sunday said it won 133 out of 288 nagar parishads in the Maharashtra local body polls, even as the Opposition alleged foul play

POOR SHOW BY MAHA VIKAS AGHADI CONTINUES

The BJP's alliance partner Shiv Sena won 46 nagar parishads, while the NCP secured 35. The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi won just 48, with the Congress accounting for 34 and the Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) winning eight and six, respectively. "Grateful to the people of Maharashtra for blessing the BJP and Mahayuti," Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote on X

BJP WINS 3,325 COUNCILLOR SEATS: FADNAVIS

- Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said the BJP won 3,325 councillor seats. "The BJP alone has won 48% of councilors," Fadnavis noted
- The latest results, coming a year after Mahayuti's decisive victory in the state Assembly elections, will be a further jolt to the Opposition, which has accused the Election Commission of aiding BJP's win | P10

2-phase

LOCAL BODY ELECTIONS IN MAHARASHTRA WERE HELD ON DECEMBER 2 AND 20

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

India seeks action on B'desh lynching

Suspends visa ops at Chattogram until further notice

JAYANTH JACOB @ New Delhi

INDIA on Sunday expressed deep concern over the lynching of a Hindu man in Bangladesh and urged Dhaka to ensure swift justice as escalating unrest prompted New Delhi to suspend visa operations in the port city of Chattogram.

Reacting to a question related to the killing of 27-year-old Dipu Chandra Das in Bangladesh's Mymensingh district, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said it is closely monitoring the situation and has taken up the matter with Bangladeshi authorities.

"India continues to keep a close watch on the evolving situation in Bangladesh. Our officials remain in touch with Bangladesh authorities and have conveyed to them our strong concerns at the attacks on minorities," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

The killing of Das, a garment factory worker, occurred amid widespread violence that erupted after the death of Sharif Osman Hadi, a prominent leader of last year's student uprising and a candidate in the February 12 general election. Hadi's shooting earlier this month sparked protests, vandalism and attacks across several parts of Bangladesh.

Das's father Ravilal Das said his son was beaten, tied to a tree, and set on fire by a mob.

Against the backdrop of rising tensions, India has suspended visa operations at the Indian Visa Application Centre (IVAC) in Chattogram until further notice. The decision follows a security incident involving stone-hurling at the residence of the Assistant High Commissioner of India in the city. "Due to recent security incident at Assistant High Commission of India Chittagong, Indian visa operations at IVAC Chittagong will remain suspended from 21/12/2025 until further notice," the IVAC said, adding that reopening would be announced after a review of the security situation.

Officials said the remaining four visa centres—in Dhaka, Khulna, Rajshahi, and Sylhet—continue to function.

India had briefly shut visa centres in Dhaka, Rajshahi, and Khulna last week after anti-India protesters attempted to march towards Indian missions. Operations in Dhaka resumed a day later, while security was tightened at Indian facilities in Sylhet on December 20.

Students during a silent protest to condemn the lynching of a Hindu man at Dhaka University. Inset: Dipu Chandra Das | AFP / X

12 arrested so far, say reports

With 2 more arrests on Sunday, police have so far detained 12 people for the lynching of Dipu Chandra Das, media reports said

No breach at B'desh HC: MEA

MEA said on Sunday that reports of security breach at Dhaka's mission in Delhi are "misleading propaganda"

Shell out more for train travel from Dec 26

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

THE Ministry of Railways on Sunday announced its second fare hike this year, expected to generate approximately ₹600 crore in additional revenue by March 31, 2026.

Under the revised structure effective December 26, rail fares will increase by one paisa per km in ordinary class for journeys exceeding 215 km, two paise per km in mail and express non-AC classes, and two paise per km in AC classes. Passengers travelling 500 km in non-AC coaches will pay ₹10 extra. No increase will apply to suburban services or monthly season tickets.

This follows the first hike announced on June 30 and implemented from July 1, which has generated ₹700 crore so far. The last hike in July came ahead of Bihar elections, while the second hike announced on Sunday comes ahead of Assembly elections in West Bengal. Railway officials justified the fare revision citing rising operational costs. Manpower expenses were ₹1,15,000 crore, pension costs ₹60,000 crore, and total operations ₹2,63,000 crore in 2024-25.

The ministry said the railways is focusing on higher cargo loading alongside fare rationalisation. With a record of 1,617 MT freight till October 2025, the Railways is now the second largest freight network in the world.

GRAMIN ACT

President gives assent to new rural jobs law

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

PRESIDENT Droupadi Murmu on Sunday gave her assent to the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

The new Act, passed amid fierce Opposition protests, guarantees 125 days of employment annually to rural households—25 days more than MGNREGA. Under a revised cost-sharing formula, states will contribute 40 percent while the Centre bears 60 percent.

According to a Rashtrapati Bhawan communiqué, the legislation establishes a rural development framework aligned with the 'Viksit Bharat 2047' vision. The Rural Development Ministry stated it "strengthens income security, modernises governance and links wage employment with creation of rural assets".

ARMY TO PROCURE 1 LAKH INDIGENOUS 9MM-PISTOLS

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

THE government has issued a request for information (RFI) to procure one lakh indigenous 9-mm pistols for the Indian Army. Nine-mm pistols are lighter and are particularly suited for close-range combat or urban warfare.

According to the RFI issued by the Ministry of Defence, the government is also seeking to procure accessories, including night sights and targeting options.

The plan is to replace the existing 9-mm semi-automatic, magazine-fed pistol from Rifle Factory Ishapore. The new pistols are expected to feature ambidextrous controls, suppressors and accessory rails to modernise older weapons.

Currently, troops in special force units of the Army use imported 9-mm pistols.

The DRDO and the Indian Army have already designed a 9-mm weapon for counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations, incorporating 3D-printed parts and a high rate of fire.

As per the RFI, the 9-mm pistol should function day and night in common weather conditions across all terrains. It should also be operational in temperatures ranging from –30 to 55 degrees Celsius.

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Govt rejected claims that the new definition of the Aravalli range will allow large-scale mining | P9

EXPRESS READ

Govt to e-auction unused excise licences, earn ₹1Kcr

Bengaluru: For the first time since the inception of the Excise department, the Congress government has set the ball rolling for auctioning of unused retail licences. "The government is expecting to earn around Rs 1,000 crore," Joint Commissioner, Excise, T Nagarajappa said | P6

Cong likes illegal B'deshis more than Assamese: PM

Guwahati: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday accused the Congress of settling and protecting illegal Bangladeshi migrants. Concluding his two-day visit to Assam, he said, "The Congress has no concern for Assam. The Congress likes illegal Bangladeshi migrants more" | P10

Rifle telescope recovered near NIA office in Jammu

Srinagar: The Jammu Rural Police on Sunday recovered a Chinese-made telescope of an assault rifle near the National Investigation Agency (NIA) headquarters. The recovery has prompted the authorities to beef up security in areas around government and military installations.

TWO DROPS OF LIFE

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah administers polio drops to a child at the launch of the Pulse Polio Immunisation programme at his home-office Krishna in Bengaluru on Sunday. Ministers Dinesh Gundu Rao and Dr G Parameshwara look on | EXPRESS | P6

Leadership crisis not created by high command: Kharge

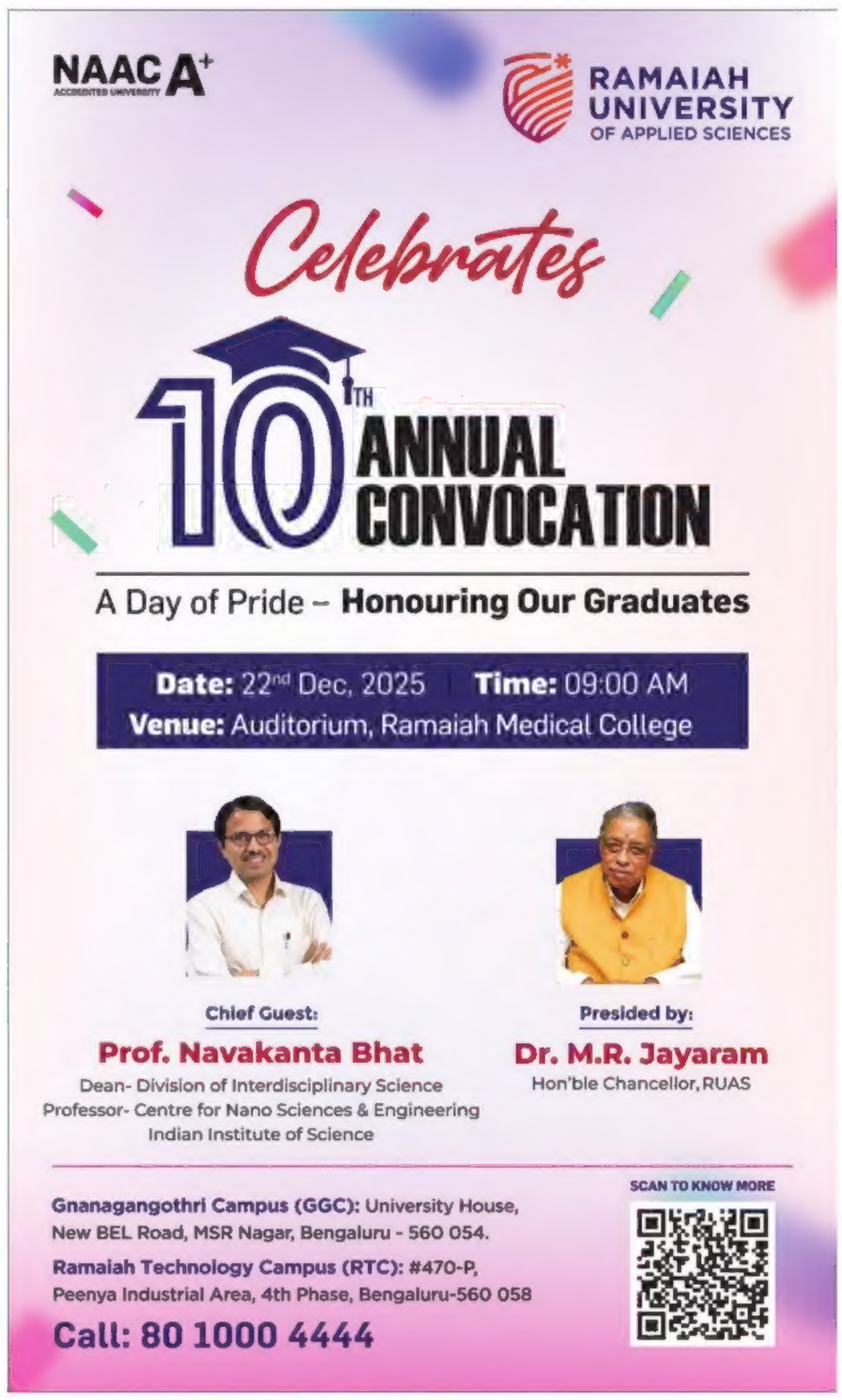
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Kalaburagi/Bengaluru

ALL-India Congress Committee (AICC) president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday sought to downplay the reported leadership tussle within the party in the state, asserting that the "confusion" is at the state level and not created by the party high command.

He urged local leaders to take responsibility and resolve internal issues, underlining that Congress is built by its workers and not by any single individual. He told the media that the party leadership in Delhi has not fuelled any dispute between Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar. "Issues, if any, must be sorted out locally. The high command has not created any confusion," he said, calling for unity and discipline within the party.

He also launched a sharp attack on the Centre over the proposed changes to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act -- MGNREGA, which he said has effectively been replaced by the VB-G RAM G Act. Describing MGNREGA as a "lifeline for the poor," he accused the Centre of deliberately weakening the scheme to harm rural workers. He criticised the reduction in the Centre–state funding ratio from 90:10 to 60:40, alleging that the move was aimed at making the poor "slaves of the rich".

Announcing nationwide protests, he said the Congress will lead an agitation against the changes, with support from other opposition parties. MORE: P4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